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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY REPORT - October 13, 2005

11. The following are brief items of interest compiled by Embassy Minsk over the past week.

Human Rights

12. New Life Church Fined Again

On October 7, a Minsk court fined New Life Church administrator Vasily Yurevich BYR 4,350,000 [USD 2,000] for organizing illegal worship service on September 4 in the former cowshed the Church bought in 2002. This fine follows the September 23 fine of BYR 4,000,000 [USD 1,900] that Yurevich received for organizing illegal worship services on July 24.

13. Opposition Youth Activist Sentenced to Three Days in Jail

On October 10, the GOB sentenced opposition youth activist Nikita Sasim to three days in jail for uttering obscenities in public. Since he was held for three days after his arrest on October 7, he was freed after the hearing as he had already served his sentence. Sasim filed a complaint against a policeman who beat him during an anti-government demonstration in September, but the authorities have dismissed it.

14. Travel Ban for Union of Belarusian Poles (UBP) Activist

On October 12, a court rejected UBP activist Andrzej Poczobut's appeal of a GOB travel ban. On July 27, a Grodno court banned him from traveling abroad until he paid the remainder of his BYR 5.1 million [USD 2,380] fine. Poczobut still owes BYR 500,000 [USD 232], but was not able to make the next payment since he was serving a short jail sentence.

15. Polish Ambassador Returned to Minsk

On October 11, Polish Ambassador Tadeusz Pawlak returned to Minsk after being recalled to Warsaw on July 28. Pawlak left Belarus after a series of reciprocal diplomatic expulsions occurred between Warsaw and Minsk. Although the decision to recall Pawlak stemmed from tension over the GOB's treatment of Polish minorities following the election of the UBP leader, the GOP stated there had been "some progress in forcing Belarus to respect the...rights of ethnic minorities" and allowed Pawlak to return.

16. National Academy of Sciences Dismisses Another Scholar

On October 10, the History Institute of the National

Academy of Sciences dismissed economic historian Andrei Kishtymov. The official reason for his dismissal was that his contract, which expired on September 30, was not renewed. However, Kishtymov maintained the state supported academic leadership did not like the tone of his research, having labeled it "anti-Soviet" and filled with "zoological hatred for the current authorities."

17. Dissident Artist Display Work in Kiev

From September 27 through October 17, the works of Belarusian dissident artists will be exhibited in Kiev. Authorities in Belarus have banned these works because they portray anti-Bolshevik resistance activists and oppose the Belarusian-Russian Union.

Civil Society

18. Third Time is Not the Charm for Party of Freedom and Progress

On October 7, the Ministry of Justice denied the registration of Vladimir Novosyad's Party of Freedom and Progress (PFP) for the third time, citing forged signatures and irregularities in funding as the reason. The PFP was created to promote liberal reform and democratic values.

19. CIS Executive Committee Is in the Red

On October 11, the CIS Executive Committee announced it had to close its dining room and cut back on

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expenditures. Since only four of the twelve members of the organization have paid their dues, the committee is suffering from financial hardships and cannot repay its RUB 1 million [USD 35,000] debt.

10. Return to Soviet Style Sports Training

On October 6, Lukashenko slammed the Federation of Trade Unions and the Sports and Education Ministries for not doing enough to properly promote sports training programs among youth. Lukashenko then announced his plan to restore the Soviet era system of sports training for youth, stating competition was the key to a well-trained athlete.

11. "Student Village" Proposed for Minsk

On October 4, Lukashenko announced his desire to build a "student village" to help house the 97,000 students in the Minsk area who cannot find space in the dormitories. The village must include sports and entertainment facilities. Lukashenko requested project cost estimates as soon as possible from his staff.

Economics

12. The GOB Acquires Majority Control of Private Company Pulp and Paper Factory

On October 12, Svetlogorsk Pulp and Paper Factory surrendered approximately 1.5 million shares worth BYR 17.3 billion [USD 80.5 million] to the GOB, thereby increasing the percentage of government ownership in the company from 47% to 76%. [Note: The government take-over of the Pulp and Paper Factory is the latest in a trend by the GOB to nationalize private companies.]

13. No More Poultry from Romania and Turkey

On October 11, the GOB announced it would no longer import poultry from Romania and Turkey after an outbreak of avian flu cases were reported in those countries. The level of poultry in the Belarus should not be greatly affected by this decision, as Belarus imports very little poultry from these countries.

14. Transparent Car Market Needed in Belarus

On October 7, Lukashenko expressed the need create domestic car markets in Belarus so Belarusians can "buy everything they need in their home country without going to Germany or Lithuania." Lukashenko does not consider the current system of open-air flea markets where people search for used parts and cars to be "civilized."

Anti-U.S.

15. U.S. Is World's Drug Trafficker, State Media Alleges

On October 13, the 7 DNEI pro-government weekly (circulation 37,885) alleged the U.S. is trying to help local drug dealers and engaging in drug trafficking by staging color revolutions in Asia. The article makes claims such as the rose revolution in Georgia was partly due to competition the Shevardnadze regime presented to U.S.-supported traffickers; the war in Afghanistan was organized to take control of the opium fields there; and because the "stan" countries became transit points for drugs it was necessary to "free" them from leaders who were trying to stop the flow of illegal drug trafficking.

Quote of the Week

16. The Minister of Education comments on the reasons why politics should stay out of universities:

"Both students and professors are citizens, and they have a right to be engaged in politics. However, we want the educational process to remain an educational process. It means that classrooms and lectures should not be used for declaration of one's views. You should keep to the curriculum and standards, as you are instructing professionals."

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